

The Christian's Gain by Death.

126

A

Funeral Sermon

Occasion'd by the

D E A T H

Of the Reverend

Mr. *Joseph Stennett,*

Late Minister of the Gospel.

Preach'd AUGUST the 22d. 1713.

By NATHANAEL HODGES. *K*

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The Christian's Guide

Universal Edition

Occasioned by the
DEATH

Of the Reverend

Mr. John



The Minister of the Gospel

Trained A. M. and the Rev.

By NATHANIEL HODGES

Author of the

Practical Christian's

Guide to a Christian's

Life, and the

Practical Christian's

Practical Christian's

PHILIP. I. 21.

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die
is Gain.*

THE Christian Faith furnishes us with the best Arguments in the World against one of the greatest, and yet one of the most common Evils of human Life, *viz.* the Fear of Death. To deliver us from this Evil, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, was one of the powerful Motives that drew down the Son of God from the Realms of Glory, *to take on him our Nature, and suffer in it, as we read in Heb. 2. 15. He also himself took part of Flesh and Blood, that thro Death he might destroy him that had the Power of Death, that is the Devil, and deliver them, who, thro Fear of Death, were all their Life-time subject to Bondage.* The Heathen World were subject to this Fear in a particular manner: Death was to them indeed the King of Terrors, according to the Apostle, *Rom. 8. 22. For we know that the whole Crea-*
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tion

A Sermon on the Death of

tion groaneth, and travaileth in Pain together until now; that is, under this Bondage of Corruption. And tho the *Jews* had, by the *Mosaick* and *Prophetick* Dispensations, sufficient Notices of another Life; yet *Life and Immortality* were never so brought to Light before, as by the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour *Jesus Christ*. But Christians are deliver'd from this Fear of Death, by this great and fundamental Truth of the Gospel, *viz.* their being redeem'd from the Guilt of Sin, which alone makes Death really terrible; For the Sting of Death is Sin, and the Strength of Sin is the Law; but Thanks be to God who hath given us the Victory, thro our Lord *Jesus Christ*, over Sin, and consequently over Death; especially by the Promise of a glorious Resurrection, when Death shall be swallow'd up in an endless Life. And it was this that made the Thoughts of Death sit so very easy upon the Mind of that Great Man, the Apostle *Paul*. He was at this time imprison'd at *Rome* for the sake of the Gospel: and having acquainted the *Philippians*, that some, in that City, preach'd Christ out of Envy and Strife, and others of good Will; he makes this Reflection, What then? Shall this add Affliction to my Bonds?

Ver. 18. No; since notwithstanding every way, whether in Pretence or in Truth, Christ is still preach'd,

Ver. 15.

Ver. 18.

preach'd, I therein do rejoice, yea and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my Salvation thro your Prayer for me, and the Supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ; according to my earnest Expectation and my Hope, that in nothing I shall be asham'd, but that with all Boldness, as always hitherto, so now also Christ shall be magnify'd in my Body, whether it be by Life or by Death.

Ver. 19.
20.

“ All that befalls this Body, which is
“ now in Bonds, and imprison'd for the
“ sake of Christ, let it live, or let it die,
“ I know it shall be for the Interest and
“ Honour of my Saviour; and if so, I
“ have my end, for these are nearest
“ my Heart.” With such a perfect Resignation was this Great Apostle dispos'd for Life or Death, that he valu'd the one only for the Glory of his Redeemer; and he would willingly submit to the other for the same reason, as either of these might promote the Name of his Lord to the best advantage: Whether the Divine Providence would spin out the slender Thread of his Life longer, knock off the Shackles from his Feet, and set open the Prison-Doors, Christ shall be magnify'd by that, to wit, by my further Ministry and Service: Or if my Body be given to be burnt, or any other way I am to be offer'd up a Sacrifice to the Glory of my Great Master,
and

Ver. 17.

and I seal his Religion with my Blood, Christ shall be magnify'd by that ; *knowing that I am set up for the Defence of the Gospel.* Thus the Apostle sets his Life and his Death in an equal Ballance, and entirely leaves it to the Choice of Providence to determine the Scale either way, that might most conduce to the Glory of his Redeemer : For, according to the words of my Text, *to me to live is Christ, and to die is Gain.* “ It is for the Interest of Christ that I “ live ; I have consecrated my Life to “ his Service ; and I live to no other purpose than to promote his Faith, to “ propagate his Gospel, and to carry on “ the glorious Design of his Redemption : ” *And to die is Gain.*

This may be understood two ways :

Ver. 12,
13.

1st. In reference to the Truths of the Gospel : My Death shall be profitable to the Interest of Religion, for this shall be witness'd by my Blood ; and so, according to the Verse before our Text, *Christ shall be magnify'd in my Body by my Death.* His Imprisonment, he would have the *Philippians* know, had a very good influence this way : *But I would ye should understand, that the things which happen'd unto me, have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel ; so that my Bonds in Christ are manifest in all the Palace,*

Palace, and in all other Places. That is, it is not only manifest in the Palace of Nero, but throughout all Rome, that I am imprison'd for no other Cause than that of Christ and his Gospel. *And many of* Ver. 14. *the Brethren in the Lord waxing confident by my Bonds, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear.* Now tho from his Imprisonment it self, others took occasion to preach Christ, purely out of Strife and Envy, yet he rejoic'd in this: for thus his very Bonds, instead of being a Disgrace to himself, or an hindrance to the Propagation of the Christian Faith, became the means of further diffusing the great Truths of the Gospel.

And hence we find that several, even of Nero's Court, were converted to this Faith; for he tells them in the close of his Epistle, *That all the Saints saluted* Ch.4. 22. *them, chiefly they that are of Cæsar's Household.* And by a stronger Reason, his Martyrdom would have a larger Influence this way; for, says he, Chap.2.17. *But* Ch.2. 17. *if I be offered upon the Sacrifice and Service of your Faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.* " That is, if while I am wholly employ'd in rendring you Gentiles an acceptable Sacrifice unto God, my Blood should be the Libation, should be as the Wine and Oil pour'd upon the sacrifices under the Law; I should rejoice

“ joice thus to die in your Service for
 “ the Confirmation of your Faith, and
 “ the Conversion of the Unbelievers: and
 “ so my Death shall be Gain to the In-
 “ terest of Christ, as well as my Life.”

For indeed the Gospel hath prevail'd in the World, even by the fiercest Opposition that hath been made against it; and the Blood of its Martyrs hath ever been the Seed of the Church.

Again, 2dly. these Words may be consider'd with reference to himself; to die, for him was gain. “ It will be extremely for my Advantage to suffer
 “ Martyrdom for Christ's sake, this will
 “ enhance my Glory, and enlarge my everlasting Rewards in another World”.

He should then be freed from all the Troubles and Miseries of Human Life, nay of an Apostolick Life; which, according to our Saviour's Predictions, was to be attended by severe Persecution, and was to be finish'd at last by Martyrdom: for they were literally to follow their Lord and Master, the *Captain of their Salvation*, the General of Life, who was himself *made perfect thro Suffering*. And in this Sense the Words intirely agree with the following Verses:

Ver. 22. *But if I live in the Flesh, this is the Fruit of my Labour; yet what I shall choose I know not.* “ That is, were it indeed
 “ left

"left to my Choice, I should be in a
 "Strait. It's true, I am perfectly re-
 "sign'd to the Will of God, either to
 "serve my Redeemer by my Life, or
 "to honour him by my Death; but
 "were it left to my own Determination,
 "I could not know which to choose: for
 "I am in a strait betwixt two, these
 "two, Life and Death." *Having a de-*
sire to depart, and to be with Christ, which
is far better. "This indeed is far bet-
 "ter for me, were I to regard my own
 immediate Interest:" *Nevertheless to a-*
bide in the Flesh some time longer, is more
needful for you. The Words taken in this
 View, as they particularly refer to the
 Apostle's suffering Martyrdom; for him
 to die after this manner was Gain in-
 deed. If there is any Glory in Heaven
 greater than other, if there be any De-
 grees in Happiness, and if there be a Pro-
 portion of Rewards, as to be sure there
 is, they that have the Honour to seal
 the true Religion with their Blood, and
 sacrifice all other Considerations to it,
 shall have a distinguish'd Blessedness.
 Who can tell the Happiness of being the
 Sons of God? *Beloved,* says the Apostle
John, now are we the Sons of God: But
it does not yet appear what we shall be; but
this we know, that when Christ shall appear,
we shall be like him; for we shall see him as

he is. Much less can we conceive the glorious Advantages of being the martyr'd Sons of God; so that in this respect to die is Gain indeed. However it is not only Gain to die the Death of Martyrs and Apostles, but if we accommodate the Words to all true Christians, and more especially to those, who labour in the Word and Doctrine, it is certain, that their Death is their Gain, even tho they have not the Glory of Martyrdom.

These Words are otherwise render'd. *Calvin* translates them, Christ is gain to me in living and in dying: And some others much after the same manner, Christ is gain to me both in Life and Death. But as the Words are introduc'd as a Reason of the Apostle's intire Devotion of himself to the Service of his Lord in the former Verse, they are, as they are here render'd, more agreeable both to the Sense of the Apostle, and the literal Construction of the Original; for It was the peremptory and Heroick Resolution of the Apostle, to magnify his Saviour in his Body, whether by Life or by Death: And the Honour of his Lord being the great End He had in View, Life or Death were indifferent to him, and He was no otherwise determin'd for either, than as that should promote the Interest

Interest of Christ. Nay, tho he was in a strait between Life and Death, and if it were left to him he knew not which to choose; not but that he seems most inclin'd to the latter; having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which was far better: yet he suspended his Desire or Choice of Death, which he knew would be so extremely beneficial to himself, upon this very account, because to live would be then more needful for the Churches.

The Words in this light give us these two Heads of Discourse.

I. That the Life of a Christian should be wholly devoted to the Interest and Service of Christ.

II. That the Death of a Christian is his real Gain.

As to the First, *That the Life of a Christian should be wholly devoted to the Interest and Service of Christ.* Thus was it with this great Apostle; for to him to live was Christ after a peculiar manner, as He had nothing more at heart than the Honour and Interest of his Lord. So, That, this was the only End of his Life, and the great Motive to him to live, appear'd throughout the whole Series of it. The Apostle *Paul* in

this matter, is the brightest Example we have in the Gospel: any one that reads his History will soon perceive that his Life was the most active, the most vigorous, and the most painful that ever was spent in the Service of his Redeemer. He himself tells us with the utmost Modesty, and ascribing all to the Grace of God, that he labour'd more abundantly than all the Apostles: *I am the least of the Apostles, and one that am not meet to be call'd an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the Grace of God I am what I am; and his Grace that was bestow'd upon me, was not in vain; but I labour'd more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the Grace of God that was in me,* 1 Cor. 15. 10. And in 2 Cor. 11. 23. to the end of the Chapter, he gives us a large Account of his Life. So that he gave sufficient demonstration, that he liv'd for no other End than the Service of his Lord, that this was the chief Business and Concern of his Life. And are not we oblig'd to imitate this great Example? And tho every Christian cannot be an Apostle, much less move in so uncommon a Sphere in the Christian Church as the Apostle Paul, yet it is the indispensable Duty of every Christian, to serve his Lord according to his Capacity, to glorify his Saviour, and devote his Life,

Life, such as it is, intirely to his Interest. We are so to live to him, as if we liv'd for no other purpose ; For, says the Apostle, *he died for us, that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to him who died for them.* As his Death was design'd for the Salvation of all that believ'd in him, so the Lives of all who are interested in his Death, should in Justice as well as Honour and Gratitude, be devoted to him : *What, know ye not,* says the Apostle to the *Corinthians*, *that your Body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, and which you have of God ? and you are not your own, for you are bought with a Price, even the precious Blood of Christ :* And being bought with such a Price, viz. the full Value of Life, the Holy Spirit hath taken possession of you, and sealed you as his own Property. And what is the Inference, *Therefore glorify God in your Body and in your Spirits, which are God's :* God's by a right of Purchase, and the Possession of his Spirit consequent upon it. And the Apostle bids these *Philippians*, *to look not every Man on his own things, but every Man also on the things of others,* Chap. 2. 4. Not that the Apostle would have Christians to be Busy-bodies, and by a contentious Curiosity pry into the Affairs of Families ; but His meaning is, a Christian is not to confine his Concern only to his own Happiness,

piness, but is generously to interest himself in the Welfare of his Fellow-Creatures: for He would have the same Mind, as in reason there ought to be, in all the Disciples of Christ that was in their Lord and Master; the same generous Disposition, the very same Inclination to do good to the Bodies and Souls of Men. Thus for every Christian to live should be Christ, nothing should be so dear and valuable to him as the Interest of his Lord; it should appear thro'out his whole Life, that he hath always the Honour and Name of his Redeemer in view; be so much devoted to him, as to be equally prepar'd to live or to die in his Service; and be absolutely resolv'd, as the Apostle was, that Christ shall be magnify'd in his Body, whether it be by Life or by Death; and if he lives in the Flesh, make it worth his while, as the Original might be translated, by engaging himself to the best advantage for his Lord: tho' which to chuse, if it were left to him, he should hardly know; and should be in a strait between two, having however a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better; For, to such a Man to die will be Gain. And this is the second Head of Discourse,

II. *That Death is a real Advantage to a sincere Christian; to die is his true Interest.*

terest. However necessary our Abode in this World may be for the Service of Christ and the Gospel, for the sake of which at least a delay of our own Happiness must be preferable; yet if we make a right Estimate of the things of this World, and are well appris'd of the Glories of being with Christ, we shall find as to our immediate Interest, to depart, to die, since this is the way to be with Christ, is far better; tho if we are serviceable to Religion, it be then, and only then, for our real Advantage to remain in this World, at least so long as Providence pleases: but whenever the time of our Departure comes, we shall find the Change of the Scene very happy for us; so happy, that the Prospect of it is enough to make us say with the Apostle, *We are always confident, therefore being always in perfect Heart, and knowing that whilst we are at home in the Body, we are absent from the Lord; for we walk by Faith, and not by Sight.* We are in perfect Heart, I say, and therefore willing to be absent from the Body, and to be present with the Lord; for it's by the way of the Grave, that we are to enter upon Immortality. If then we consider more particularly, that for a Servant of Christ's to die, is to make the gainful Exchange of an imperfect State

2 Cor. 5.
6, 7, 8.
θαπνύτες
ἐν κυρίῳ.

State of Life for a perfect one, of a troublesome and miserable State for a Life of pure Felicity and unmixed Happiness, and of a frail and mortal Life for Immortality and Eternal Life; we shall find that it is such a Man's Interest to die.

As to the First of these: There is no Perfection, strictly speaking, in this Life; there is no such thing as perfect Knowledge, or perfect Holiness, or perfect Ease. The most advanc'd Knowledge is mixed with Ignorance and Error. There is no Man so perfect in Holiness, as never to transgress or come short of his Duty: There is no Man so perfectly at Ease, as to have nothing that gives him Displeasure; but in the other State, there is perfect Knowledge, perfect Holiness, and perfect Satisfaction; there is the most intimate Knowledge of God, and all necessary Truth: *We all with open Face, as in a Glass, behold the Glory of the Lord, and are chang'd from Glory to Glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord*; that is, we do, under the Gospel, with open Face, with Faces unveil'd, behold the Glory of the Lord, in comparison to that obscure Dispensation of the Law: and we all behold the Glory of the Lord as in a Glass*, in a Riddle; which is a very obscure Form of Speech, in comparison to that bright State of Knowledge we shall have in

* ἐν ἀνάλυ-
σει.

in the other World. *And now we know but in part, says the Apostle, and prophesy but in part; but when that State of Knowledg is come which is perfect, then that Knowledg which is but in part shall be done away. When I was a Child, I spoke as a Child, I understood as a Child; but when I became a Man, I put away childish things. And the like Difference, as if the Apostle had added, will there be between our Knowledg now, and our Knowledg then: For now we see thro a Glass darkly, but then we shall see Face to Face; we shall contemplate Truth with the greatest Nearness and Perspicuity. Now I know but in part, but then I shall know even as I am known; that is, then we shall have a very clear, distinct and comprehensive Knowledg of God and Truth. Now we walk by Faith, and Faith is only the Evidence of things not seen, and the Substance of things hop'd for; but this other happy State is a State of Light. Our Knowledg of God and Truth will be more direct: Our intellectual Powers and Faculties will be rais'd and refin'd to such a degree of Strength, that we shall know the Nature and Attributes of God, and all profitable Truth, after a more perfect manner than we are capable of in this State of Frailty. Here we are liable to a great many Mistakes and*

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Errors,

Errors, our Minds are bias'd by various Prejudices. We are apt not only to have confus'd Apprehensions of a Supreme Being and Truth, but false Conceptions. But in this other State, the Strength of our Faculties and the Clearness of our Knowledg will set us absolutely free from all Error and Mistake. O! happy and glorious Change! who that considers the Imperfections of his own Mind, the Prejudices which attend him, and make him so frequently form a wrong Judgment; who that considers how little He knows of God and of the Nature of things, would not willingly leave this dark and ignorant World, to enter into those blessed Regions of Light and Knowledg?

Again, in this other State there is perfect Holiness. In this World there is no Man that lives and sins not: our very Natures are deprav'd; we are born with a bias to Evil, and we bring the Seeds of Corruption into the World with us. The most advanc'd Christian hath reason to say with the Apostle Paul, *O wretched Man that I am! who shall deliver me from this Body of Sin and Death?* But in that other State there will be no Sin. By Death we intirely put off our corrupt Natures. In Heaven we shall have no evil Inclinations to mortify; no proud Thought or Imagination

to

to bring into subjection; no more Perverseness or Obstinacy in our Wills; no more Confusion in our Passions: we shall know no more what belongs to Malice, Revenge, Ambition, and the Desires of the Flesh which pollute and enslave the Mind; Temptations to Sin shall cease, as well as Sin it self, for ever. Here we encounter a World of Temptations; whether they proceed from the evil Frame of our Natures, from the Power of Example; from the Riches, and Honours, and Pleasures of Life; from Poverty, Sickness, Persecution, and the common Miseries of Mankind; from the Influence of our Prejudices and the Strength of our Passions; or whether from the invisible Power of evil Spirits: all that we can possibly do, thro Divine Grace, is little enough to make us overcome them, and arrive at any tolerable degree of Vertue. But in the other World we shall be intirely freed from all these; we shall enjoy a perfection of Piety and Vertue. And is it not our Interest, is it not our Gain to die? Is it not our Advantage to be conform'd to the Will of God? Is it not our Happiness to be gloriously assimilated, both in our Bodies and Minds, to our blessed Saviour, who is the Standard of Glory? *For this we know, that when our*

*Saviour shall appear, we shall be like him ;
for we shall see him as he is.*

Again, In this other State there will be perfect Satisfaction. And this is the second thing I mention'd, that a Christian by Death makes the happy Exchange of a very troublesom and miserable Life at the best, for a Life of pure Felicity and Happiness. No Man is at perfect Ease in this World ; for put a Man in the most agreeable Circumstances imaginable, suppose him to have a large Fortune, a sound State of Health, a Competency of good Sense, and a sufficient Compass of Knowledg ; suppose him to have a good natural Temper, to have a clear and unblemish'd Reputation ; to be as happy in his Relations as it is possible for a Man to be, and he himself of a generous and frank Disposition : and add to all these, suppose him to be truly Religious. I say, suppose such a Case as this ; (for perhaps there is hardly one Man in the World that enjoys all these Circumstances together) yet it is impossible that this Man should enjoy perfect Ease without some mixture of Dissatisfaction ; for since we suppose him to be Religious, Anger and Displeasure at himself, Shame and Regret, Sorrow and Grief are his indispensable Duty. Nay, they are a part of his Happiness, because there is no Man lives
and

and sins not; and sense of Sin and Guilt, and how short he comes of his Duty, and the Glory of God, must make him uneasy, even at the same time that they are necessary to make him happy. On the other hand; if you do not suppose him truly Religious, if with all the other happy Circumstances he is a wicked Man; then it is impossible he should have any true real Ease and Satisfaction at all: but in this other State there will be pure unmix'd Felicity, there will be no sense of Guilt: there can be no Disappointment, no Affliction, no fear of God's Displeasure; no doubt of his Love, or of our own; no trouble of Conscience; no wounded Spirit, no Distemper of Body, nor Imperfection of Mind. Our Troubles and Dissatisfactions may go with us to our Graves, but they shall be for ever buried there, never to rise again. *The ransom'd of the Lord shall return and come to Sion with Songs, and everlasting Joys upon their Heads: they shall obtain Joy and Gladness, and Sorrow and Sighing shall flee away, Isa. 35. and the last. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them to living Fountains of Water, and God shall wipe away all Tears from their Eyes, Rev. 7. 17.* And certainly there is no Man that is truly sensible of the Vanity of all things
here

here below ; the little Satisfaction that's possibly to be had under the most happy Circumstances ; the various Disappointments we meet withal in our several Schemes of Pleasure ; the many little Incidents which discompose us, and the innumerable ways there are of making us uneasy here : No Man, I say, can seriously advert to these things, without having a very great Value for that State which shall set us at perfect Liberty from them, put us at an infinite distance from all manner of Evils, and fix us in a Condition of perfect Serenity at God's Right Hand, *where there is Fulness of Joy, and Pleasures for evermore* ; where we shall be perfectly Holy, and consequently perfectly Happy ; where we shall have perfect Communion with God, enjoy the glorious Society of our Redeemer, and the most intire Amity and Friendship with blessed Angels and glorify'd Saints. Oh ! blessed State, Oh ! happy Change. If this be to die, who would not embrace Death with open Arms ? Death is no longer the King of Terrors, but the Harbinger of Gladtidings. And if we add to all this, that for a true Christian to die, is to make an Exchange of a Frail and Mortal, for an Immortal and Endless Life, it is Gain indeed to die. For add Eternity to a

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Perfection of Knowledg and Holiness, and there will be Fulness of Joy and Pleasure. After this Consideration, *Oh Death, where is thy Sting? O Grave, where is thy Victory?* Thanks be to God, who hath given us the Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ; Who hath thus abolish'd Death, and brought Life and Immortality to Light. Oh! who would not desire to depart, since it is to be with Christ? Who would not be absent from the Body, seeing it is the way to be present with the Lord?

Having thus finish'd this very agreeable Doctrine of our Holy Religion, let us make the following Practical Reflections.

In the 1st place: From the Apostle's saying, that to die was his Gain, and to depart and to be with Christ, was much better than to live; we may justly infer, That the Souls of those who believe in Jesus, immediately upon their departure from their Bodies, enter into a State of Blessedness: for else how could the Apostle talk of being absent from the Body, in order to his being present with the Lord? Nor can any Account possibly be given, how such a Man as the Apostle Paul could be in a strait, which to choose, whether Life or Death; if his Soul, after Death, was to be as insensible

sible as his Body. Can we imagine that the Apostle, who was so zealous for the Interest of his Saviour, could prefer a State of Insensibility to a Life so qualify'd to promote his Glory? Was it any part of the Apostle's Happiness in Life, to be under the Influence of so glorious a Principle as Love to Christ? And could he prefer to this, a State void of all Love, and which must render him perfectly incapable of exerting the least Desire towards the ador'd Object of his Soul? No! had he not been well assur'd that to die would be his Gain, his Mind could not have been in suspense in a Case, that otherwise was so very plain.

2^{ly}. We have hence good reason frequently to contemplate our latter End. What we regard as our Gain and Interest, we often turn our Minds upon. If then we have any tolerable Assurance, that for us to die will be Gain, the Thoughts of Death will be far from being disagreeable to us; we shall often visit the Chambers of the Dead, and regard Death as a Passage only to eternal Life.

3^{ly}. We may hence easily account for that Distribution of Good and Evil, in the Divine Governance, which to us appears unequal in this present State of things. If in this Life only the persecuted Christian had hope, he would be of all men
most

most miserable; but if we consider the Gain of his Death, it is easy to justify Divine Providence in the severest part of its Discipline. When indeed a Man takes a View of Human Nature, and sees what a Profusion of Power, and Riches, and Honours is lodg'd in the hands of Men, who act so far beneath the Dignity of their Nature, that they justly deserve the Character of Monsters and Brutes, it's enough to shock the most religious Mind: But when He considers their End, and goes into the Sanctuary of God, like the Psalmist, he can easily reconcile these Difficulties of Providence. Therefore the Apostles were continually animated, under their various Sufferings, by the Promise of the Glories of an Eternal World, and the Prospect of for ever living and reigning with Christ, once their suffering, but now their triumphant Lord. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distress'd; we are perplex'd, but not in Despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroy'd: Always bearing about in the Body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the Life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our Body: And tho our outward Man perish, our inward Man is renew'd day by day.* And what was the Principle of this Greatness of Mind? What was it that

D

thus

2 Cor. 4:
8, 9, 10, 16

2 Cor. 4.
17, 18.

Ch. 5. 1.

thus gave a continual Supply of Vigour to the Soul, and renew'd it day by day?

'Twas this blessed Prospect: *For our light Affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are Temporal, but the things which are not seen are Eternal. For we know, that if our Earthly House of this Tabernacle were dissolv'd, we have a Building of God, an House not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens.*

4ly. and Lastly, This Consideration should easily reconcile us to Death, to our own, and that of our most intimate Friends and Relations. Why should we grieve that we our selves are, in a short time, to be taken from the Miseries and Evils of this frail, this sinful State; or that our Friends are already made happy before us? It is true, the Author of our Being hath wisely order'd our Frame after such a manner, that the Desire of Life is natural to us, and consequently is not easily to be extinguish'd. And, on the other hand, it is hard to suppress our passionate Grievs for the Loss of Friends and Relations, endear'd to us by a thousand engaging Qualities: but yet it is possible to hold our own Lives as indifferently

differently as the Apostle did his. And it is certainly our Duty, according to him, not to sorrow as the Heathens, or as those that had no Hope. But yet we must be insensible to the last degree, even to Stupidity, if we are not intimately affected with the Death of that great Man that occasion'd this Discourse.

To him to live was Christ indeed, for he very early devoted himself to the Service of his Redeemer. *From a Child he knew the Holy Scriptures, and this made him wise to Salvation, his own, and that of others, thro Faith which is in Christ Jesus.* For he made so good a start this way, that it was the peculiar Satisfaction of his religious Parents, and the Admiration of all who then were acquainted with him. I am very sensible I am now undertaking an unequal Task, whilst I attempt the Character of this eminent Servant of Christ: His whole Life was one continual Series of Labour and intense Application to promote the great Truths of the Gospel; he intirely bent his Studies this way; and the uncommon Accomplishments that adorn'd his Mind and Life, were all directed for the Interest of his Lord: like the Apostle he resolv'd, that all his great Capacities should centre here.

A Sermon on the Death of

He made, by the force of his own Genius and Industry, under many Disadvantages, a very great Progress in substantial, useful and polite Learning and Knowledg. And how closely he thought, and with what Advantage he read, appear'd very evident from his Performances in the Pulpit, and from the Press.

With what Clearness and Perspicuity would he explain the Holy Scriptures! with what just Criticism would he set them in their true and proper Light! How rightly would he then divide the Word of Truth! How free and natural was his Method! How close and distinct, and yet how various was his Reasoning! one intire Thred ran thro all the parts of his Argument. What advantageous Turns would he frequently give the Subject he was handling! With what Strength and Poignancy, and yet with what Meekness and Compassion would he overturn the false Schemes in Divinity that others had erected, contrary to the plain Sense of the Sacred Records? And when he came to reflect upon the Truths he had so well explain'd, and so incontestably prov'd, how would he strike the different Passions, engage the Affections, and captivate the whole Heart! How soft and melodious was his Voice! How sweet his Accent? How insinuating

insinuating his Expressions; and, at the same time, how very correct and polite was his Language!

But we shall hear this Angelick Voice no more: However (like *Abel*) tho he is dead, he yet *speaks*, and will *speak* by his excellent Works, so long as Protestant Knowledg and Protestant Liberty endure in these Kingdoms.

Of what admirable use his *Discourses upon the Reasonableness and Advantages of an early Conversion* have been, there are a great many living Witnesses.

His Polemical Performance is manag'd with an Accuracy peculiar to himself, interspers'd with the most agreeable Turns of Wit and Satyr; and yet the whole is done with the utmost Candour and Gentility.

*Answer to
Ruffen.*

His Poetry (which was imploy'd on Divine Subjects) is capable of pleasing the nicest Taste. How strong and nervous is his Sense! How musical and flowing his Periods! And as he sung to the best Advantage in his last printed Performance this way; to wit, in his *Dedication*, wherein with such harmonious Strength he celebrates the Praises of his Redeemer; so he is gone to improve this heavenly Talent in eternal *Hallelujahs*.

Sacramental Hymns.

And

And as he had those uncommon Accomplishments, with which God had made him thus serviceable to the Interest of Religion ; so he was endu'd with extraordinary Modesty, that gave Beauty and Lustre to all the rest. For notwithstanding his great Abilities for the Pulpit, he never went into it, or came out of it, but the Concern of his Mind was easily discern'd in the blush of his Countenance ; and what he commends in the Character of his dear Friend Mr. Piggott, he practis'd himself, and never publish'd any of his excellent Works, without consulting even inferior Judgments.

His Piety towards God was very great and very exemplary.

His Constancy and Fidelity to the Principles of his Conscience, justly reproaches those who, from a Meanness of Spirit, sneak from the Profession of their Principles. Very great Offers indeed had been made him, which he might have enjoy'd too, and yet have retain'd the Liberty of professing his Sentiments ; but he generously refus'd the *Emoluments*, since he could not comply with the *Work* of them. This must have been a prodigious Temptation to one, who was so tender of his Family, so ambitious of doing Justice as well as Good ;
and

and to one too, who continually struggl'd under such strait Circumstances, as this eminent Servant of Christ did. But his Soul was too great, and his Love to God too intense, to submit to any Temptation this way: for he despis'd those temporal Advantages that had ensnar'd so many base Spirits; and that which has been a Temptation to others, may be really said to be none to him. For his great rejoicing, like that of the Apostle, was this, *That in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, not with Flesbly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God, he had his Conversation in this World:* And more abundantly to youwards his little Flock.

That which perfected his Character as a Christian, and as a Minister, was his universal Charity, and his extensive and unfeigned Love to his Brethren. And tho no Man could possibly be more Artful, and Steady, and Zealous, without the breach of Charity, to assert and defend those Sentiments in lesser Matters of Religion, wherein he differ'd from his Brethren; yet the very Spirit of Christ continually breath'd in him. What generous Allowances would he make for the Prejudices and Imperfections of his Christian Brethren! He had always an Apology in his Breast for their innocent Errors.

Nor

A Sermon on the Death of

Nor was his Prudence less conspicuous than his other Virtues. This appear'd in a very particular manner in the management of that nice and critical Province of Reproof; when he could convict, and cause Remorse, without leaving any possibility of offending behind him.

What Calmness, what Patience, what Serenity ran through his whole Conduct! How sweet his Mein! how finish'd his Address! how fine and surprizing was his Wit! how improving and instructing his Conversation! and how Polite, how Penetrating was his Judgment, and how regular! Into what a clear and distinct Method would he at once throw the confus'd Thoughts of lesser Minds! These excellent Talents did God endow him withal, to qualify him for the Work of of the Ministry, *for the edifying the Body of Christ.*

Nor must I forget his Capacity for Friendship; this appear'd in a particular Instance, to wit, the great Concern he was in, that his Spirits were so very low, that he could not finish a Poem he had begun, and made a considerable Progress in; design'd for the Memory of his dear departed Friend, Mr. *John Piggott*. In which he had these Lines amidst a great many others, *viz.*

Bless'd



Bless'd Soul! when thou was't vigorous and strong,

How oft I faintly drag'd my Shell along!

Thinking the Heavenly Regions to explore

Long before thou should'st touch the Blissful Shore:

But thou hast got the Start, thy Heavenly Mind

Could bear no longer to be here confin'd.

He was certainly capable of moving in a much higher Sphere; and had Divine Providence design'd him the Riches and Honours that this World venerate even to Idolatry, he would have shone much more to the Advantage of his Personal Character: but this was reserv'd to a much more glorious World.

There he is advanc'd indeed, where all his great Capacities will have their full Improvement, and their full Lustre. For no doubt is to be made, (according to the Account of Glory and Happiness which our holy Religion furnishes us withal in that other blessed World) but that according to our Capacities and Attainments in this State of Probation, we shall have a proportionable Share of Bliss and Glory. The more our Reason is improv'd and advanc'd here, the more capacious and intense will be our Intui-

E tion;

tion; the larger and more comprehensive our Knowledge here, the more extensive shall it be there; the firmer our Hope, the nearer shall be our Vision; the more we do for Christ, and the more we suffer for him, the greater shall be our Reward in Heaven. A thousand noble Genius's, through one wretched Circumstance of Life or other, are intirely lost and suppress'd in this World; but there every one shall shine according to his Capacity. And if so, in what a bright Orb of Happiness and Glory does our dear departed Friend move in the Celestial Regions!

It was the Prospect of this, that made him, near the close of his excellent Life, express with a triumphant Joy, his Assurance of Eternal Glory; saying, "*He rejoiced in the God of his Salvation, who was his Strength and his God; that he knew whom he had serv'd, and in whom he had believed.*"

His Patience under his very severe and afflictive Circumstances was wonderful: as he had too much Piety ever to repine against his God, under the most melancholy Providences, so his Patience had its perfect Work after such a manner, that he was never heard to cast the least Reflection upon any, from whom he had reason to expect better Treatment.

Nor

Nor was his Life more serene than his Death ; the last Words he could speak, and which were to my self, who had the Advantage of his intimate Friendship, were, " That he was perfectly satisfy'd." The Serenity of his departing Soul appear'd in the Smiles of his Face, and he breath'd forth his Spirit into the Arms of his Redeemer with a victorious Joy. It will be well to use his own Words : " If the Grief occasion'd by this Decease become a godly Sorrow, by a just Application of our Thoughts to the Voice of God's Providence, which speaks so loudly to us in this severe Affliction" ; I would fain persuade my self, that I need not aggravate to you, the Members of his Congregation, your great Loss ; I pray God make you truly and wisely sensible of it. And as to your future Conduct, I shall only say in the words of the Apostle to these *Philippians*, in the beginning of the second Chapter : *If there be therefore any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies ; Fulfil me my Joy, says the Apostle. Fulfil you that which would have been the Joy of your faithful Pastor : that you be like-minded, having the same Love, being of one Accord, of one Mind. Let nothing be done through Strife, or Vain-glory.*

I am sure I need not aggravate this severe Stroke to his dear Remains; this is a Case, to use his own words, "that
 " loudly calls for Commiseration, and may
 " well make his mournful Consort cry
 " out with the saddest accents of Sorrow,
 " Have pity on me, have Pity on me,
 " Oh! my Friends; for the Hand of God
 " hath touched me. Yet let not her
 " sorrowful Soul utterly refuse to be
 " comforted, since it ought to be ac-
 " counted a Favour of Divine Provi-
 " dence, to have been related" to so
 great and so good a Man.

And may his dear Offspring never forget the Charge he gave them with his dying Breath, when he administered to them all the Consolation and Advice that then lay in his Power: " Know, says he
 " if you are Good and Religious, my
 " God will be your God."

To conclude: Let us all follow the Faith of this great Man, considering the End of his Conversation. Our Loss is his Gain. Tho he is absent from us, he is certainly present with the Lord. Let us therefore so conduct our selves, that when we are dead, it may be as justly said of us, as it is of the Reverend Deceased, *That for us to Live is Christ, but to Die is Gain.*

F I N I S.



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